EL SALVADOR
THE NEXT "VIETNAM"

Even as THE VETERAN is being printed the situation in El Savador looks increasingly serious. Before leaving office the Carter administration renewed aid to the military government in that country and the Reagan administration has continued the series of U.S. blunders by removing the U.S. Ambassador who had the courage to criticize U.S. policies there. Even more serious is the news that U.S. "advisors" have been tripled; while the number is still quite low, those of us who remember the early days of Vietnam are aware that it doesn't take much to get involved, and Reagan's avowed anti-communist crusade leaves no room for a liberation struggle.

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VETS WIN ROUND IN AGENT ORANGE BATTLE

Vietnam veterans, their families and other victims of the defoliant Agent Orange have been on a legal roller coaster for the past several months. Meanwhile, the fight to get the Veterans Administration to do its job and to test, treat and compensate victims of Agent Orange poisoning has continued to grow as vets realize more and more that no matter what happens in the courts, veterans must finally end up relying on their own efforts to get done what needs to be done.

The class action suit on behalf of Vietnam veterans and their families against the major chemical companies who manufactured Agent Orange began in 1979 under the direction of the New York law firm of Yannacone and Yannacone, and has since grown to be represented by 1250 lawyers representing 150 law firms spread across the country. The demands that the chemical companies contribute to a trust fund which would be used to compensate veterans and their families for injuries resulting from exposure to the deadly defoliant. The suit is based on the fact that the chemical companies were well aware of the possible effects of their products but, in the interests of making more bucks, didn't bother to inform either the government or veterans of what could happen to them.

In late November, 1980, the class action suit suffered a severe reversal when a New York Appeals panel threw the case out saying that veterans could sue individually in their separate state courts, but that a federal class action suit was not legal. Had the decision stood up it would clearly have meant the end of the suit, since there are few--if any--veterans with the expertise or the resources to take on the giant chemical companies one by one in state courts.

Barely a month later, however, in a kind of belated Christmas present to Vietnam vets, the 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the initial ruling and while it excluded vets from having the right to sue the government (another part of the original lawsuit), it allowed the class action suit against the chemical companies and said that hearings on the case should begin as soon as possible. Prospects are good that cases may begin to be heard by the summer of 1981 (which is quick for the courts). Attorneys for the chemical companies have already filed an appeal and the courts have taken such different positions up to this point that no vet should start counting his money from the suit, but the situation looks promising and lawyers representing the veterans are optimistic.

Meanwhile, in early January, the consortium of lawyers representing the veterans filed another suit, this time naming the Veterans Administration as defendant for what amounts to maltreatment of Agent Orange victims. The most recent suit points out that the V.A. has systematically treated what in fact were symptoms of Agent Orange as instead various symptoms of pyschosis, using the traditional V.A. procedure of drugging any vets whose problems might be mental. Since the cheapest solution to any problem is always the easiest, according to the V.A., they have normally stuffed with drugs any vet whose symptoms are not immediately treatable with aspirin.

Another field of battle--that of public opinion and through it, forcing the V.A. to do its job--has also had its ups and downs in the past several months. While Congress has quietly blithered about independent investigations of the effects of Agent Orange, results of these studies are still years away (during which time vets will continue to get sick and die as a result of their exposure, which was something more real than insulated Congressmen can seem to realize). And as the lame duck Congress waddled into obscurity it is impossible to say what of their parting actions will ever go into effect.

By September, 1980, the V.A. said it had examined more than 30,000 veterans who believed their health had been affected by exposure to Agent Orange. Clearly the word is out. But, at the same time, the V.A. has yet to come up off one dime in compensation or treatment for these vets, apparently hoping that somehow the whole affair will just disappear. But even if affected vets wanted to let it all disappear, the effects of the toxic poison on vets and their families will make that impossible.

Even the minimal steps taken by Congress and the V.A. are testament to the effect of vets in action demanding that there be testing, treatment and compensation for Agent Orange victims. When there's enough noise and enough pressure, even the bureaucracy will grind slowly forward. The campaign platform in Reagan's campaign is another testament since, though it does not admit the fact that Agent Orange causes health problems, at least admits enough to say that vet-victims should be treated by the V.A. until investigations of the problems are completed.

All this motion and countermotion means little to the Vietnam vet who watches his body wither away as a result of Agent Orange or sees his kids dying as a result of his exposure. For vets or their wives who call VVAW because they are dying of cancer or are suffering from sudden fits of rage we have not

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VETS' NOTES Cutting Thru Red Tape Making Sense of Regs

Discharges

Hundreds of thousands of vets came back from Vietnam not only with the many scars of the war but carrying the added problem of a less-than honorable discharge. Not only did this bad paper prohibit many vets from making use of various vets' benefits, but in a job market which has never been worth a damn for Vietnam vets, jobs were even harder to come by.

VVAW, since 1970 has pushed for a single-type of discharge, pointing out where the bad discharges came from --often an administrative way for a unit commander to get rid of a GI who refused to put up with all the military nonsense or who fought against the war--and how they were used--as a threat hanging over the head of GI's. Whenever the question of amnesty was raised we raised the additional question of bad discharges.

While we still have not won the unconditional amnesty or the single-type discharge that we fought for, the battle did result in a number of victories: a large amnesty program was put into effect (though still not the universal and unconditional amnesty we demanded), and the Departm of Defense was forced to institute wholesale discharge reviews.

The latest such review, in which certain types of bad discharges are automatically upgraded has had its deadline extended until the first of April, 1981. Discharges involved include certain kinds of administrative discharges and many bad discharges given for various drug offenses. For vets who fall into these categories it is well worth the effort since the complicated paperwork involved in individual upgrading through a series of discharge reviews is not required.

In an attempt to get the program as widely used as possible the Defense Department has set up an information packet which can be gotten merely by writing to: Department of Defense Discharge Review, P.O. Box 21, St Louis, MO 63166.

G.I. Bill & Debt Collection

After the usual prolonged struggle by vets, Congress finally decided to raise the GI Bill payments by 10%. While no student-vet is going to refuse the increase, it comes in the face of two related developments: a yearly inflation rate of well over 12%, and an unemployment rate among Vietnam-era vets which is almost double that of a year ago. According to recent statistics, over 500,000 Vietnam-era vets are unemployed; of these, 422,000 vets are between the ages of 25 and 39 (the average Vietnam vet at this time is 34 years old with two children, meaning that unemployment is likely to be a greater problem than when vets were just out of the service). For many vets in the past a period of unemployment was an incentive to use the GI Bill in order to survive while increasing their job potential, but the majority of vets now unemployed don't even have the meager GI Bill to rely on since they have passed the 10-year delimiting date.

Given the situation that many vets were in (and are still in) it's not surprising that defaults on V.A. loans, inability to repay money for dropped courses, defaults on home-loan guaran-

tees and not returning the V.A.'s overpayments have now reached a total of $570 million. While that is a large chunk of cash it's about the half the cost of a B-1 bomber.

There are no statistics on the number of vets who started the semester in school but, because they found a job, because a VA check was late and they had to drop out, or just because the GI Bill payments weren't enough to pay the landlord and buy food, are now faced with having been "overpaid" by the VA. Given the closeness with which the VA monitored school records, requiring all kinds of paperwork for vets who missed classes, in many cases the overpayment was one month's check (and often this came even when the VA was informed that the vet had cut down his classes or dropped out of school).

For vets currently in school or for vets who are being chased by the VA for GI Bill overpayments, there are a number of circumstances in which the VA will allow classes to be dropped even after the final drop date without penalty:

*A serious illness either for the vet or his immediate family.

*Financial problems which required course changes or dropping a course.

*The school dropping a course.

For the majority of vets who are now under siege by the VA because of non-payment of whatever debt they owe, the reins are about to tighten as the VA pursues its money (it's unfortunate that they will not expend the same amount of energy to find a treatment for Agent Orange--we would now all be cured). For some years now vets applying for home loans have been denied these loans if they had an outstanding debt with the VA; for over a year debts of over $1200 have been turned over to the Justice Department for collection.

Many more plans are afoot to recover every dime owed to the VA--while wives of Congressional ABSCAM defendants find boxes of money under their beds. In September of 1980 the VA had passed

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We know the problems Vietnam era veterans face, and we're here to help you get the help you need . . . without the hassles.
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No Vote Beats Candidates
REAGAN WINS, PEOPLE LOSE

It took only a couple of years of being bombarded by presidential candidates before the American people made a decision: in overwhelming numbers they voted either for a losing candidate or didn't vote at all. Some 25% of registered voters were counted for Reagan and if the number of voting age people who didn't even bother to register are added, the majority not voting for Reagan is even larger--some 82%.

Despite the general disgust with the choice being offered, the Reagan administration moved into Washington. The White House has undergone a transformation into the corporate headquarters of the USA Inc with Reagan as Chairman of the Board. Though angels may fear to tread on the plush boardroom carpets, millionaire businessmen walk with the assurance that their man is sitting behind the big desk with his finger on the trigger. And, that he has surrounded himself with gold-plated (and white-faced) male advisors whose latest brush with poverty was attending a United Appeal cocktail party.

Certainly the flurry of activities which went on in the days immediately following the election could only encourage every right-wing nut rampaging the streets and TV waves of the country. An all-white jury in Greensboro, North Carolina, puts its stamp of approval on the murder of people protesting racism by Nazis and the KKK when, despite TV films of the actual murders, they found the killers innocent. Congress decided to forbid use of government funds for integration brought about by school bussing. Jerry Falwell's "moral majority" announced plans to clean-up TV programs and, in anticipation the Public Broadcasting System began to censor potentially objectionable political comments from its programs. And the KKK proudly publicized its camps (previously disguised as "Explorer Posts") where white youth are given weapons training for the coming "race war."

All these were little gusts to show us which way the wind is blowing. In the background, more significant signs of things to come are brewing. Auto manufacturers, we are told, are now much less concerned about their large loses over the past year in anticipation that they will be able to make up their bucks when the Reagan administration relaxes the emission control standards (while the people of Los Angeles were smothering from smog in the summer of '79 Reagan distinguished himself by saying that emission control standards had done their job--which was no doubt true on Reagan's ranch, far away from traffic).

Oil executives are licking their chops at the prospect of immediate decontrol of the oil industry so they can charge more for gas so they can use the money to buy more wells to pump more gas to charge us more for and thus cut down our "dependence" on foreign oil. The plan will work, no doubt, for the 2% of the population who will be able to afford more than a thimblefull of gasoline. And it will work wonders for the already inflated profits of the oil companies.

"With the election over, we won't have anything to worry about except the next four years."

Around the world right-wing governments and forces were dancing in the streets--and taking out their joy by mounting increased attacks on any kind of left-leaning group. As feeble as was Carter's commitment to "human rights," his policy served as a brake to some of the more outrageous acts of right-wing governments; Reagan's pronouncement that "moderate repression" was just fine with him took the brakes off around the world.

Back at home there was the Heritage Foundation, a right-wing think tank (as they describe themselves) dedicated to all that's best of the 17th century. They were right off the block in offering their ideas on the domestic scene to Reagan's transition teams (several of whom are "fellows" in the Foundation already) and were, in response, promised that their ideas would receive careful consideration. Their proposals on dealing with domestic dissent make Nixon's attempts at building an imperial presidency look almost gentle: they would have the government drop all the safeguards that were put in place after Watergate, allowing illegal break-ins, phone taps, mail investigations. While they don't advocate concentration camps for those who dare speak against the regime, they're setting the scene, and people who look back on the days of Joe McCarthy and witch hunts with horror may end up seeing those as the "good old days."

Reagan's cabinet appointments do nothing to dispell the corporate image. From Secretary of State Haig, a corporate general whose career was made by being buddy-buddy with Nixon to Secretary of the Interior Watts who seems to want to cut down every tree in every national park to satisfy the lumber industry, appointees have cozy ties to almost every industry which wants something from the government. Only groups which represent the people of the country have no voice--the elderly (while Reagan's "team" is predominately elderly itself they are hardly people who must survive on social security), the poor, the people on welfare, union members, consumer groups.

One group is being taken into consideration--veterans. Reagan's advisors, long before the election, saw the value of meeting some of the demands of vets. As an October, '79 position paper on veterans said, "With more than 30 million veterans of voting age in the U.S., representing a significant inroad

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Test&Treat Agent Orange! No Draft,No War!

VETERANS' DAY

On November 8th, a typically cold, crisp day in Chicago, VVAW broke with tradition, of a sort, to commemorate Veterans Day, 1980. Chicago VVAW members joined a contingent from Milwaukee and Madison VVAW, Chicago Vets for Peace, representatives from the Veterans Leadership Conference, the Illinois Veterans Congress, the Illinois Vietnam Veterans Civic Council, and several chapters of the Midwest Coalition Against Registration and the Draft.

Bill Davis, Chairman-elect of the Illinois Vietnam Veterans Civic Council and a member of VVAW, spoke briefly about the general conditions facing Vietnam veterans and how, over the last half decade there has been no significant progress on major issues like employment, health care, upgrading of benefits for Vietnam vets. He noted that in spite of promises and well intentioned "too little too late" programs, the Carter administration with its huge V.A. budget, continued the decline of veterans' services. Davis pointed out that, "in spite of the promises being made to vets by the incoming Reagan administration and assorted politicians, we've heard these songs before and the tunes have all been sour." Davis also noted that little has been done to defuse the growing anger and frustration on the part of vets. "When we came back from 'Nam we had to go to the V.A. for what we needed. We raised hell about the conditions. We picketed, seized and held V.A. offices, and were continually burned and co-opted by the system. The older vets organizations characterized us as malcontents and crybabies. Within the next 10 to 15 years more and more older vets will be turning to the V.A. for help. The services we fought for--and which were declining then--just won't be there. Perhaps this time they'll join us on the picket lines."

Bill Davis of the Illinois Vietnam Veterans Civic Council speaking during Vets Day ceremonies at Daley Plaza in Chicago.

Joan Maimon, Chairperson of the Veterans Leadership Conference read a statement about what the Reagan administration was promising vets. Paul Galvan, of Chicago's Loop College, read a statement with detailed specifics about Reagan's plans about Agent Orange, in particular a promised independent study on the problem.

The final speaker was Barry Romo from the VVAW National Office; he spoke with particular anger about Reagan's reference to Vietnam as a "noble experiment." Romo stated, "If Vietnam can be called a noble cause, which it wasn't, Vietnam vets certainly haven't been treated like nobility." He went on to say, "Here we are faced with the possibility of a new draft and another war, and the same people who profited from the last one are ignoring the problems facing the vets who fought it. The people in this country aren't stupid. They won't want another generation to go through what we have."

The program at Chicago's Daley Plaza was officially closed as the son of a Chicago VVAW member and possible Agent Orange victim, placed a wreath at the Veterans Memorial, the Eternal Flame, not simply to commemorate the dead, but to point to the futility of man of their deaths and the continuing struggle of living vets.

"Traditional Vets Day"

The "traditional" Veterans Day in Chicago was, in most respects, the normal, drab and forgettable ceremony it always has been. Held during the middle of the week, the ceremony was missed by most vets who, even had they been interested, could not have attended. Dominated by the Legion and VFW, the program consisted primarily of their patting each other on the back, congratulating each other on the magnificent job they've done for vets.

Jane Byrne, Chicago's mayor, passed by an invitation to attend, choosing instead to dedicate a new "El" train stop which had more media value than this annual sleeper. She sent George Dunne, Chairman of the Cook Country Democrats, who poo-pahed, blah-blahed, and sat back down. Present on the stage was Roland Libonatti, former Congressman and confidant of Al Capone. As the Legion's legal type he has built a new career over the last decade keeping Vietnam vets and their organizations out of the "official ceremonies." This year was probably his greatest moment: not only did no Vietnam nor Vietnam-era vets participate in the program but there were none in attendance! That's right: zero! With the exception of a couple of us to observe and report on the activities, no Vietnam vets attended. Someone reported that a person who resembled a 'Nam vet was there earlier but left--probably out of disgust.

We congratulate the program committee, also. When the rolls were read and heroics mentioned, Vietnam wasn't. In fact one could believe it didn't exist or had never occurred unless we had lived it--and continue to!

Aside from the idiot running around dressed like Uncle Sam and the morons selling Nazi and moral majority newspapers, the big thrill was watching the "precision" drill team from the Legion mill around trying to figure out which direction to face, fire their M-1's in a ragged semblance of a salute, and watching the crowd flinch as these bozos swung their weapons in all directions desperately trying to clear and chamber another round.

It's just as well we Vietnam vets aren't welcome. Who the hell wants to be part of that kind of travesty anyway? We don't have any drill team. The cops would freak out if one Vietnam vet showed up anywhere with a weapon, much less an organized group. We don't need drill teams, fancy parades or bullshit programs. We need decent benefits, testing and treatment and compensation for victims of Agent Orange; we want a future for our kids without a draft and without their wars for profit at our expense.

WE NEVER FORGET,
WE NEVER FORGIVE!

CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONDEMN US AID TO EL SALVADOR

On November 8, 1980, the United States Catholic Conference, a group known for its conservative policies, denounced the right-wing supported violence against the Roman Catholic Church in El Salvador and urged the United States Government to withold military aid and political support for El Salvador's military-backed Government.

In a statement issued in Washington, the Most Rev. Thomas C. Kelly, general secretary of the National Conference of Roman Catholic Bishops, said that the Church in El Salvador was being attacked because, "it has embraced the pastoral task of accompanying the people in their hope, in their struggle, and in their suffering."

The Most Rev. Frank J. Harrison, Bishop of Syracuse, in a letter to then Secretary of State Edmund Muskie said that, "that military dominated Government enjoys the support of your Administration but not the support of the Salvadoran people. We, along with millions of Christians in Latin America, are not afraid of the wave of change sweeping Central America because that change is rooted in a desire to create more just societies."

Interview With Maryknoll Missionary
THE US & EL SALVADOR

El Salvador is a small country in Central America. Controlled by a military junta (made in the USA) it is the largest recipient of U.S. military officer training conducted in the Panama Canal Zone. It is also racked by a civil war that has claimed close to 10,000 lives, among them more than 100 priests and nuns from the Catholic Church. In order to find out more about the situation and to inform our readers, we interviewed Father Roy Bourgeois, a Maryknoll missionary who has spent more than 5 years in South America including an investigative trip to El Salvador.

Fr Bourgeois grew up and attended college in Louisiana. He joined the Navy in 1962; from 1966-1967 he was in Vietnam where he was wounded and received a Purple Heart. He decided on becoming a missionary after his experiences with a Catholic orphanage in Vietnam caring for 400 children. He said, "I went over thinking the Vietnamese communists were our enemy but found that it was the poor and struggling people of Vietnam whom we were fighting."

Father Roy Bourgeois collecting funds for El Salvador relief.

Upon returning to the U.S. Fr Bourgeois joined the Maryknolls, a Catholic missionary group centered mainly in South America. During seminary he became involved with VVAW in the early '70's in New York. "I was torn," he said, "about what to do (when he was supposed to leave for Bolivia) about belonging to the antiwar movement, but I left and Bolivia was home for the next five years, where I worked in a community development program in the Barrio, a slum."

"My first three years were mainly social work, setting up medical clinis, day-care centers, teaching school. I was living in a small room for $8 a month, living with the people. I heard the cry of hungry children at night. I decided then to become a voice for and with the people.

"Things became very oppressive and we formed a Human Rights Commission to speak out for the needs of the poor and against U.S. aid to the Bolivian dictatorship. Then, one day I I was arrested by four plainclothes policemen with machine guns and taken to jail." Fr Bourgeois was worked over, tortured by the secret police to find out the names of the Bolivians he was working with. They did not find out any names and luckily, the Bishop of La Paz found out about his abduction and put pressure on the ruling generals for his release. He was declared persona non grata and sent back to the U.S.

In 1978 Fr Bourgeois was sent to El Salvador as part of a Church Human Rights Commission and has continued to work on the situation there. He explained: "First, you have got a situation of exploitation, an oligarchy of the so-called 14 families who own 65% of the farm land, businesses and companies. The weath and power are in the hands of a few. As for the rest of the country, 40% of the children die before they reach the age of six. Those who do work are paid on the average a dollar a day. Illiteracy stands at 65%. There is a limit to what the people can take--they are beginning to resist.

"The resistance is made up of different sectors. First, the peasants (mostly small farmers) who work the land for the 14 families. Second, the workers; in El Salvador labor unions are outlawed and it is the death penalty for organizing one. Third, students, university professors, high school teachers, even doctors. Many doctors have been killed. There are also small businessmen who feel they cannot make it under the ruling families. All of these different sectors are resisting the 2% (who control the military, the police and the National Guard). Incidentally, many of the officers have been trained at West Point.

"The State Department likes to portray the struggle as one between the extreme left and the extreme right. The truth of the matter is that the struggle is a liberation struggle. The majority (90%) make up the peoples' forces; they are fighting to overthrow the small ruling class.

"The U.S. does not want to admit this. The struggle is basically one of the people to survive. Bishop Oscar Romero said this and was killed on March 24. Prior to this, on February 17th, he wrote a letter to Carter pleading with him not to send aid to the ruling junta. On April 1st, the U.S. approved $5.5 million in military aid and $30 million in 'economic aid.'"

Fr Bourgeois closed by saying, "I talk to a lot of high school students, and tell them, if we (the U.S.) fights (in El Salvador) it will be against the people of El Salvador, the poor and the oppressed. They will be asked to come to the aid of the oligarcy and they had damn well better know who they are fighting for and who they are fighting against."

Fr Bourgeois expects to be reassigned to the Missions in 1981, either to Guatemala or El Salvador.

Reagan and his transition team have already said they think too much has been made of "Human Rights" and that the U.S. should not be ashamed to support "moderately repressive" dictatorships. Two of Reagan's main foreign affairs advisors have served in the past as agents of Central American dictators. His main foreign affairs advisor, Allen, was a foreign lobbyist for the Portuguese government to gain support for their colonial wars in Africa. Reagan's team has announced that the U.S. must be prepared to send troops anywhere regardless of world opinion or support. And the recent events in El Salvador demonstrate that the rulers believe they can move against the people without incurring any disfavor in the U.S.

STOP INTERVENTION

The government has an elaborate list of items it wants to send to El Salvador--helicopters, patrol boats, jeeps, riot control gear and training in "internal security." But before this wish list can be funded, Congress has to act. And that's where individuals can come in. A letter to your Congressman or Senator can't hurt and may help slow down the propping up of yet another military dictatorship.

For more information, write:
El Salvador Solidarity Committee
3411 West Diversey
Chicago, IL 60647
(312) 227-1632

Psychological Problems in Vietnam Vets

V.A. "DISCOVERS" DELAYED STRESS

Vietnam was a different kind of war. Instead of young French girls throwing roses, Vietnamese were throwing hand grenades. Instead of being received by the people as "liberators," we were met by peasants who treated us as invaders. Rather than fighting against a corrupt dictatorship, we were propping one up. The myth of Vietnam being an American fight for freedom and democracy exploded in the reality of My Lai-type massacres. Vietnam veterans faced the incredible contradiction of the government propaganda with the bloody reality.

Most vets were pretty quiet about their experiences in Vietnam. This wasn't wholly because the people back home were not supporting the war as some pundits are now saying, but because many people did not want to hear the reality of our experiences. How many of us wrote the letters home, while we were in Vietnam, even to our families which never talked about the reality of what we were doing. And more than a few of us were ashamed and embarrassed about what America had done to the Vietnamese and tried to put it out of our minds, tried to shove it deep into our memories and leave it. But not talking about our experiences did not make them go away--in fact more and more of those memories persist in coming back.

VVAW was one of the first groups to deal with what doctors and psychologists are now calling "delayed stress syndrome." As early as eleven years ago VVAW set up rap groups to deal with what we then called "Post-Vietnam Syndrome." At the time the V.A., older vets' groups and the government were denying its existence but VVAW knew it was real because we had to deal with it on a daily basis. Ten years later the reality of psychological problems has become so accute that even the V.A. is forced to deal with its existence.

As of October 1st, 1980, the V.A. has "discovered" the existence of what it calls "post traumatic stress neurosis (disorder)"--which is the same thing as PVS used to be or delayed stress syndrome is today. The V.A.'s definition of what will permit the award of disability is as follows:

"Post-traumatic stress neurosis (disorder) is a psychiatric disorder having its onset as an incident of armed conflict or enemy action, or following bombing, shipwreck, or internment under inhumane or severely deprived conditions or similar life threatening episodes....(There must be)

a. A recognizable stressor that would be expected to evoke significant symptoms in almost all individuals, that is, a life threatenting episode....

b. Re-experiencing the traumatic event either by a recurrent and intrusive recollection of the event, dream of the event, or suddenly acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were occurring because of an association with an environmental or ideational stimulus.

c. Numbing of response to or involvement with the external world...feeling of detachment or estrangement from others, or marked constriction of affective responses.

d. At least two of the following symptoms that were not present prior to the traumatic event:

1. Hyperalertness or exaggerated startle response.
2. Sleep disturbance.
3. Guilt about surviving while others have not.
4. Memory impairment or trouble concentrating.
5. Avoidance of activities that arouse recollection of the traumatic event.
6. Intensification of symptoms by exposure to events that symbolize or resemble the traumatic event."

The V.A. circular from which this information is taken goes on to discuss acute and chronic problems, says that if the disorder doesn't fit all these standards it is not worthy of compensation and warns against assuming that vets who are just alienated or have "dropped out" are suffering any compensatable disorder. However, once the criteria have been satisfied, according to the V.A., a vet may be awarded anywhere from 0% to 100% disability.

Cutting through the jargon, the V.A. directive seems to say that vets must prove, through their military records, that they were involved in a life-threatening event (and few of us who were in Vietnam didn't face at least a couple of them) and that their lives, since that time, have been affected by the event. Exactly how that will be proved remains to be seen.

Since the time the V.A. directive came out, there have been some cases of veterans who have won disability payments as a result of post-traumatic stress neurosis. Craig Williams, a 9th Infantry vet in Minneapolis, won $133 a month and all the psychiatric care he needs after only a three-year battle with the V.A. After he had been out of 'Nam for 8 years he began having flashbacks and nightmares. He spent three months with a V.A. psychiatrist who diagnosed him as having war neurosis, but then had to stop because the problems were not "service connected"!!!

Williams comments, "I wasn't interested in monetary compensation, my objective was to get a service-related disability for the trauma I received in Nam so I could continue with therapy.... The government was responsible for this and I think that it should take care of a great number of guys who are out there with the same thing."

A few independent psychologists have taken a great interest in the problem. Psychologist John Wilson of Michigan State says it's possible by 1985 that "40-50 percent of the combat veterans could have problems serious enough to impair normal functioning if strategic intervention is not forthcoming soon." And Dr Charles Figley of Purdue estimates that as many as 68% of combat vets still have recurring dreams and nightmares, indicating latent anxieties. "The symptoms might be delayed," he says, "but the problems are always there."

It is a triumph, of sorts, that the V.A. was finally forced to recognize the existence of service-connected psychological disabilities resulting from service in Vietnam. The victory came because vets would not let the issue die--and could not let it die because it is something that thousands of us live with every day and every night. How much it is connected with exposure to Agent Orange is now under investigation, though for the veteran or his family living through the problems, their interest is less in the cause than in how to best deal with the situation.

When VVAW first tried to approach the problem of PVS back in the late 1960's, we built the "rap" groups knowing that vets would talk more easily with other vets. We did this without benefit of consultants or V.A. psychiatrists--but because we knew it needed to be done. The V.A. has yet to develop a better, more effective form of treatment, and $133 a month is not enough to pay for broken marriages, inability to hold a job, or any of the hundred and one other things that are the result of PVS. Vets finally made the V.A. do its job--or at least start to--on this issue; and we will do it again!

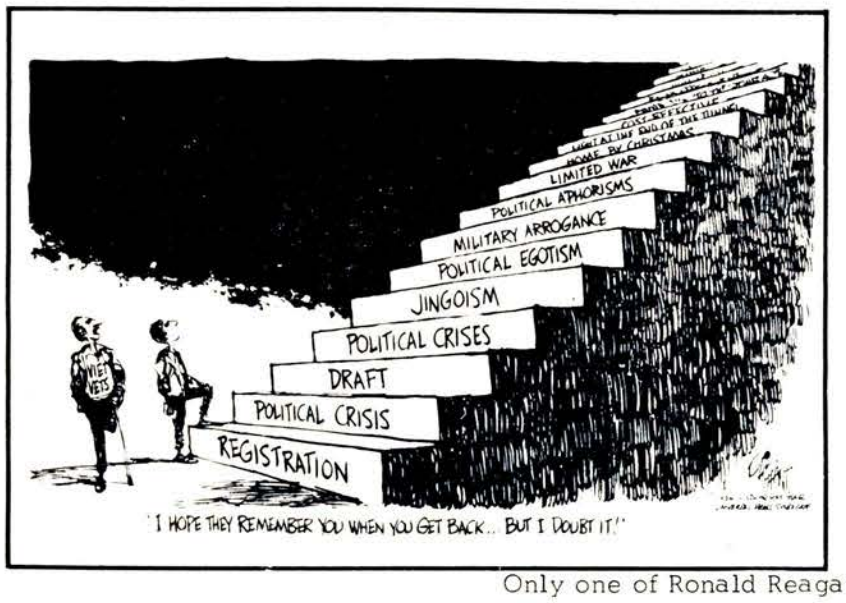
NEW ADDRESS
NEW PHONE

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

P.O. Box 25592
Chicago, IL 60625
(312) 989-4684 or
463-2127

Used in War, then Thrown Away, But Not Again

NO DRAFT, NO WAY



WW II VETS DENIED ACCESS TO PARADE

John Knights and Charles Andrews, World War II veterans, were asked to leave a Veterans' Day parade because their cars carried signs saying "GI Guinea Pigs," a reference to their having been part of atomic tests and now suffering from cancer.

The Grand Marshall of the parade, James Miller, said: "Sure, we've had people die from things they've been tested with, but don't barge in on our parade. Today was a day for dead and wounded veterans."

The excluded veterans came to the parade with signboards on their cars saying, "Atomic Veterans," "GI Guinea Pigs," and "Human Cancer Time Bombs."

VVAW, whose members and chapters have been consistently excluded from "official" Vets Day ceremonies, understands how veterans can somehow not be sufficiently "wounded" or sufficiently "dead" to participate in the parades run by the ex-cooks and bottle-washers of traditional veterans organizations. We hope that the two radiation vets did as VVAW has done--hold your own parade to say what needs to be said!

Only one of Ronald Reagan's campaign planks dealt with ending the peacetime draft, and who knows how many votes that won for him? Most people realized that while he opposed the peacetime draft he was quite willing to start a war instead and institute the war-time draft in a moment. But with the election won and inauguration over, even the opposition to the peacetime draft disappeared under the crunch of advice from military counsellors.

Whether or not the anti-draft campaign promises won him any votes, Reagan and his political advisors did gage correctly a real feeling among millions of Americans. When the Carter Administration pushed through the new registration plan and that plan went into effect, large demonstrations across the country took place at postoffices where the official registration was taking place for 19 and 20 year olds.

Immediately, the media across the country began to report massive non-compliance: 31% in Baltimore, 32% in Chicago, 47% in Peoria, Illinois, and on and on. In an independent survey by the Boston Globe , 25% of eligible young men did not sign up. But within days the Selective Service System announced that 95% of all eligible registrants signed up--a remarkable statistical sleight-of-hand: the government had announced earlier it would take up to four months to compile the figures, but when Carter's sagging political fortunes needed a boost, suddenly the figures were immediately available. What dark crevice these figures were pulled out of can only be guessed.

Pro-draft forces did not rely on carrot of patriotism to persuade young men to sign up. Carter's Attorney General issued lethal threats against anyone who refused to register. Despite the threats nearly a thousand young men across the U. S. stood up before the media and publically defied the government on the basis of their personal, moral or political opposition to registration. To date not one charge has been brought against these bold young men.

By even the most conservative estimate, one million men did not register. Huge numbers noted on their forms that they were registering under protest, others put in for conscientious objector status, an unknown number of bogus applications were made by men past draft age, women filled out forms using their first initials and last names. In all, registration took place, but it was absurd to say it was "successful."

Anti-draft forces and coalitions, organized nationwide, were a key factor in deflating the registration drive. Representing a broad segment of society, the potential registrants, their families, students, young workers, women, trade unionists, political groups of many types, and veterans--particularly Vietnam vets--laid a solid foundation of organization and experience which made the anti-draft movement stronger from the start than its predecessor in the early 1960's (which was succesful in getting registration and the draft shelved).

The American public was not quite as gullible as the government seemed to hope. With increasing international tension between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, with the events in Iran, and the presence of military "advisors" in Central America (particularly in El Salvador) who would believe we needed a "peace-time" registration but there were no plans for a draft. Come on guys--you may try to keep us ignorant, but we're not that stupid!

The anti-draft movement more than met its first test on the first round; anti-draft forces were out again during the early weeks of January when the law called for registration of the next crop of potential cannon fodder; no statistics are yet available on this last mass registration attempt (in the future registrants will be expected to register on their 18th birthday).

With the future of registration and the draft uncertain under the Reagan regime, still the anti-draft forces have made some significant gains. After a period of low activity, they have grown and, more important, have successfully branched out into community levels bringing in more people--people who have often not been involved in political issues in the past.

Legal battles which still surround the draft are also important. Not one of the men who went public against registration has yet been prosecuted. Of the million (at least) non-registrants, there is no feat of federal prosecution that can only handle 40,000 cases a year (which includes every federal prosecution for anything) which can make a dent in charges brought against those who refused to register. If federal courts dealt with nothing but anti-registration cases for the next twenty years they would still not finish--and that even assumes no one will refuse to register in the future!

And the government has other problems with the draft: a federal ruling now prohibits the use of social security numbers as a form of identification for registrants, something which will make finding non-registrants even more difficult. And an ACLU suit challenging the registration laws on the basis of sex discrimination is now before the Supreme Court, which, while it may try to duck the issue, will still have to put forward some ruling which can well have widespread effects.

Much of the anti-draft activity nationwide has gone on in small local groups growing out of a couple of individuals whose opposition to registration was strong enough to get them out to organize others. In an attempt to coordinate this activity nationwide, the Coalition Against Registration and the Draft (CARD) is, with other groups, putting together an anti-draft conference to be held at Wayne State University in Detroit in mid February to plan a national strategy for anti-draft work for the future. VVAW will be there and everywhere else possible to use our experience to help build the anti-draft forces.

NO DRAFT, NO WAR!

AUSTRALIAN VETERANS AND AGENT ORANGE VICTIMS

It's a familiar story to Vietnam vets everywhere. There's the initial knowledge about the use of defoliants in Southeast Asia. Then came the case histories of cancer deaths, physical and mental symptoms, stillborn and deformed children.

Vietnam vets, either in already existing organizations, new groups, and finally coalitions began to do battle with the government, the veterans administration, chemical companies and even traditional vets organizations.

The fight for testing, treatment and compensation follows a twisted maze of half-stepoing, double-dealing bureaucracies, vicious counter-attacks by the chemical companies and "next-to-nothing" support from the traditional vets organizations which voice support for Agent Orange victims while sitting on their large asses and launching slanderous attacks on Vietnam vets leading the fight.

So what's new, you say??? Well, the difference here is that it's not U.S. Vietnam vets we're talking about, but the mirror image of our battle in Australia. Like VVAW and other Vietnam vets groups in the U.S., the nationwide Vietnam Veterans Association (Australia) is waging an uphill battle against the effects of Agent Orange.

In recent correspondence with VVAW, Graham Bell, President, Queensland branch of V.V.A.A., stated, "One of the main problems we have in Australia is that several decision makers and influential public figures, both inside and outside the federal parliament, have placed every possible obstacle in the way of the Vietnam veterans, possibly out of fear of what will happen to them once we get an independent judicial inquiry--there has been very little direct public opposition to us, but behind the scenes, it is a very dirty and vicious fight."

The Returned Service League of Australia, an organization built along the lines of our American Legion or VFW, has been one of the major stumbling blocks in the path of the V.V.A.A. Bell commented, "The RSL is the largest and wealthiest ex-service organization in Australia. Vietnam war veterans have been approaching the RSL for assistance for over ten years, yet it is only since August 1979 that the RSL has made any moves on the issue of chemical agents and health problems."

In a significant move, the RSL openly attacked the Vietnam Veterans Association as merely trying "to gain cheap publicity by repeated attacks on the RSL."

Cheap publicity indeed! It is outrageous even to insinuate that Vietnam veterans fighting for their lives and the well-being of their families would require such methods, though we know that we have to fight for each inch of print and second of air time to expose the horror of Agent Orange and other chemical defoliants.

The V.V.A.A. demands certainly cannot be labelled as outlandish. They ask for an independent judicial inquiry into:

1. The misuse of certain inherently dangerous and certain chemical agents during the Vietnam War.

2. The various attempts to cover up and to mislead on the risks, applications, effects and disposal of these chemicals.

VVAW welcomes our brothers in Australia to the battles already being waged by U.S. and New Zealand Vietnam vets to right the wrongs of the use of Agent Orange; all of us need all the help we can get.

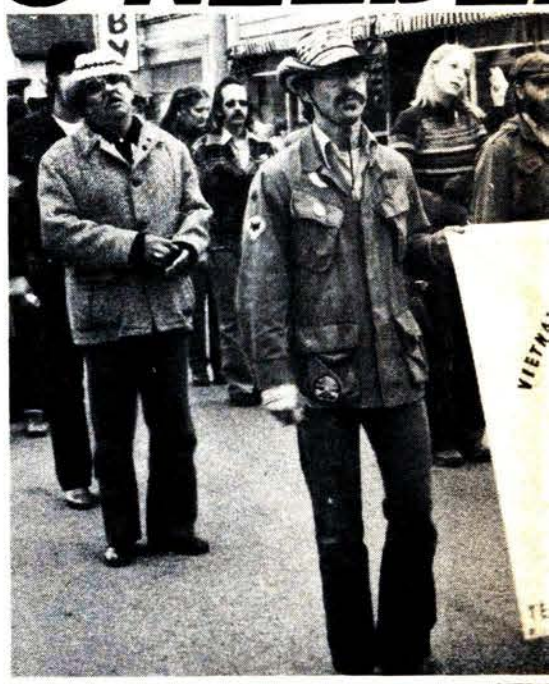
---Bill Davis, VVAW National Office

WHY VIETNAM VETERANS A
WHAT IS NEEDE

VVAW has now been around well over 13 years. We started as an organization of veterans protesting the war we had fought in, and grew to become a veterans' organization concerned with a decent life at home and fighting against intervention abroad. We have never based ourselves on backing political candidates, or finding jobs in the bureaucracy for ourselves but in organizing vets to have a voice of their own. But, given the general situation of vets today with all the problems vets face, the question has to be asked: "Why VVAW?" "Why not an Agent Orange coalition, or an anti-draft coalition--or even the American Legion or VFW?"

The question around the more "traditional" vets groups such as the American Legion or Veterans of Foreign Wars is fairly easy. Just on a personal level most Vietnam vets know and remember our reception in these groups when we returned from 'Nam. They were most interested in our dues, but not at all interested in our views. More than a few Vietnam vets got into bar fights with the cooks and bottlewashers from the class of '42 who wanted to tell us that we didn't know what a "real war" was like, and how they "won" their war! Beside that, for many of us, reminiscing about killing "gooks" or saluting a post commander or parroting the "Pledge of Allegiance" was not our idea of a fun weekend.

But with all of this the political problems lay at the base of Vietnam vets' problems with the traditional vets organizations. Most Vietnam vets could not take the racism, the reactionary attitudes and the willingness of 50 old farts to fight to the last drop of our friend's blood. Simply put, we wanted our friends home and the war over; we knew from our own experiences in the paddies and jungles that the war was wrong, a rich man's war and a poor man's fight! We found no glory in Mai Lai nor justification in the Saigon government. Older vets groups might find lost youth and macho memories in Vietnam but we thought about the dead and dying.



This situation has not changed today. The American Legion or VFW

Who Are We, Where We Ca
VIETNAM VETERANS

Vietnam Veterans Against the War began in 1967 to join the ranks of those who wanted an end of U.S. involvement in Indochina. Basic principles of the organization have continued ever since: we have fought against unjust wars, whether the U.S. invasion of Indochina or the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan. We have supported, by whatever means were possible, those who are fighting for their own liberation.

From its early days VVAW has operated on the knowledge that the government will give vets the things we need only when forced to do so--that vets get nothing for nothing. We've learned that when one vet fights alone, there is a limited amount he or she can do, but when veterans unite to fight together, there is no limit on what can be accomplished. VVAW has seen some real successes: helping to put an end to U.S. troops in Southeast Asia, helping to get Nixon tossed out of office on his ear, winning (to a great extent) amnesty for many who resisted the Vietnam War, getting the Veterans Administration to begin the process of looking for answers to Agent Orange poisoning and to recognize Post-Vietnam Syndrome (now called "delayed-stress syndrome") as a service-connected disability.

VVAW has consistently stood with the interests of vets of all eras, especially Vietnam and Vietnam-era vets, and this has often brought us into conflict with more traditional veterans' organizations. While the Legion or VFW have hawked more wars, VVAW

S AGAINST THE WAR?

ED FOR VETS

VFW will applaud our "noble experiment" in Vietnam and our future noble experiments in El Salvador, the Middle East or in Africa. We must suffer the effects of the experiment in the form of Agent Orange poisoning, delayed-stress syndrome and more. Our job is not to applaud war but to oppose it.

But opposing wars of aggression is not enough. A simply "political" vets group that speaks at anti-war rallies or carries a banner in a march cannot fit the bill either. Veterans are victims of the very wars they fought in. They are put through mind-bending experiences, used as guinea pigs in experiments such as atomic tests, poisoned as with Agent Orange, crippled, and then thrown away. As veterans we have to speak to the issue of war to stop our children and younger brothers and sisters from becoming victims. But we must also organize veterans to fight for social justice--to win what we deserve in the forms of disability, re-education, jobs and the other benefits we were promised.

We have learned in our struggles for decent benefits for vets that politicians and bureaucrats are long on promises and short on action. That necessitates organizing, educating and demonstrating as well as negotiating.

Today there are dozens of vets organizations, many of which are devoted to a single issue concerning a single grievance. VVAW is one of the few organizations which takes up both the question of future wars and also fights around a better life here. It's also the only group that has seen tens of thousands of Vietnam vets join in the past, and which is still looked to for leadership by thousands upon thousands of veterans. This gives VVAW a unique opportunity to help to build and develop a strong, national veterans organization to challenge the policies of neglect at home and adventurism abroad.

In the early 1970's VVAW played a role in giving a real boost to the anti-war movement. In the 1980's we can play the rule of uniting other local vets groups and bring our experience and talents to continue to develop the present anti-militarism--and avoid making some of the mistakes of the past.

e Came From, Who Can Join

S AGAINST THE WAR

has fought against future U.S. wars of aggression as in Vietnam; while traditional organizations have waved the flag at every opportunity, VVAW has always asked "Why?" We've opposed moves toward war, are fighting against registration and the draft which will follow, welcomed vets with bad discharges into the organization and fought to get the discharge system dropped entirely from the military.

We know what it means to have been unsed once by the government and its corporate backers, and then thrown away with a bad GI Bill, wretched healthcare, Agent Orange ravaging our bodies, no jobs and all the other problems that Vietnam vets face. We do not intend to see our children go through the same thing in the next war for somebody else's profit!

VVAW is a democratic organization built on local chapters around the country; meetings of representatives from the chapters (the National Steering Committee) and a yearly meeting of the entire membership of the organization develop programs and policies, and elect the members of the National Office which is responsible for the daily operation of VVAW. VVAW welcomes veterans of any era as well as non-vets who are interested in building the struggle to win what vets need. For more information on joining the chapter in your area, or for building a chapter in an area where there is now no VVAW chapter, please contact the VVAW National Office, VVAW P.O. Box 25592 Chicago,IL. 60625 .★

agent orange song

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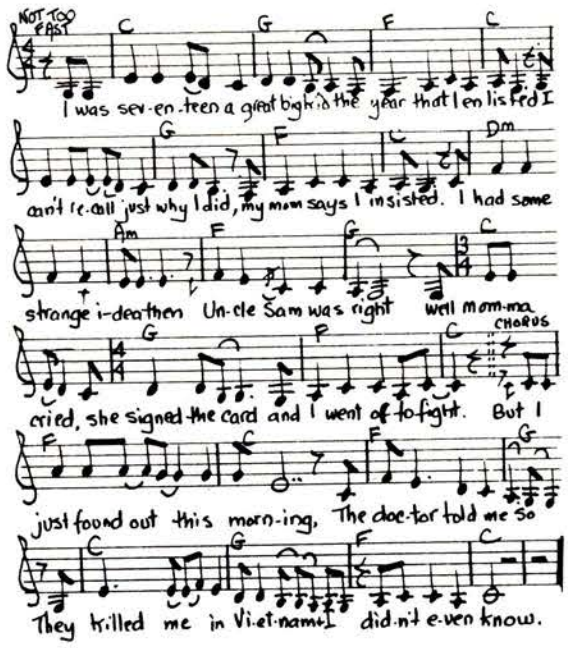
words and music Muriel Hogan

1. Well, I was seventeen, a great big kid, the year that I enlisted
I can't recall just why I did, my mom says I insisted.
Well, I had some strange idea then that Uncle Sam was right,
Well, Momma cried, but she signed the card, and I went off to fight.

2. Got off the plane in Vietnam, it didn't seem like war;
With all I saw, I started wondering what we came there for;
The officers got drunk at night, cheated on their wives,
Those peasants on the other side were struggling for their lives.

3. You know, the Army tried some fancy stuff to bring them to their knees,
Like Agent Orange defoliants to clear the brush and trees;
We'd fly all day above the trails through clouds of poison spray,
But they never said that chemical would hurt my health to day.

CHORUS:
Because I got the news this morning,
The doctor told me so,
They killed me in Vietnam and I didn't even know.

4. I tried hard to forget that war like everybody else did,
I settled down with Kathy, we tried to have some kids.
But our little boy had birth defects, the doctors had their doubts.
They never guessed what caused it, but I think I just found out.
(chorus)

5. This Agent Orange from Vietnam, we carry with us still,
It stays inside for years and years, it does its best to kill.
You might get cancer of the liver, might get cancer of the skin,
Might get a VA disability you might not live to win.

6. The doctor said I've got some time, he was trying to be kind,
You know, I've never been a radical, but this has changed my mind.
Now I'd be so proud to hear my sons say, "Hell, no, we won't go!
Because you killed our dad in Vietnam and he didn't even know.
(chorus)

NOTE: This song was based on the last words of Paul Ruetersham of Norwalk, Connecticut, who died of stomach cancer in December, 1978, ten years after his tour of duty as helicopter crewman in Vietnam. He was 27. The song reflects the experiences of many Vietnam vets and is not a strictly biographical account of Ruetershan's life. He spent his last days organising and publicising the cause of his fatal illness and his fighting spirit deserves commemoration.

AGENT ORANGE & NEW ZEALAND VETERANS

New Zealand's version of the American Legion has recently discovered a series of medical problems among their members who fought in Vietnam: skin rashes, increased incidence of cancer, and children born with deformities. Surprise! Now they are talking about the possibility of Agent Orange poisoning of New Zealand Vietnam vets.

While New Zealand troops were not in Vietnam in great numbers, it is good to hear that a "traditional" vets organization somewhere is taking up the cause of vets poisoned by Agent Orange. Victims of Agent Orange need all the help they can get from anywhere in the world!

continued from page 1

AGENT ORANGE

much more to offer at this point than sympathy, understanding, and some suggestions about how to get involved in the struggle. We hope that vets do get involved in the fight whether it is to ban the components of Agent Orange from use in local parks (a fight which has recently succeeded in Madison, Wisconsin) or to build the necessary opinion to get the testing, treatment and compensation that vets need. We will win what we need, but it's up to vets to make that victory as quick as possible.

(For more information about getting involved either in the struggle to win testing, treatment and compensation for Agent Orange victims or to join the lawsuit, write or call VVAW for a copy of our Self-Help Guide for Agent Orange victims--it doesn't answer all the question that vets have, but it is a good start toward getting involved.)

NEW ADDRESS!

THE VETERAN
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US,USSR Involved

CRISIS IN POLAND

Poland recently went through a mamouth strike wave that has resulted in many changes in Polish life and government. But many people have been left in the dark by the U.S. media reporting of the events, causes and consequences of this "unrest."

First, to understand what is happening, people should throw away all their preconceptions about Poland. While it is a member of the Soviet Block, it is dominated culturally and economically by the West. (For example, 15 of 20 films recently showing in Warsaw were Western films. The Poles have also accumulated a debt of $20 billion to the West, more than the entire third world indebtedness to the entire Soviet Block.) The Polish army is fiercely nationalistic and has won many restrictions on Soviet troops in Poland. The Polish government was very unenthusiastic about the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Catholic Church is very strong. 90% of the farmland belongs to single peasant households rather than massive state farms. Finally, three times in the last 24 years a government has fallen in Poland as a result of worker unrest.

The cause of the present crisis in Poland was a severe economic crisis. Food shortages were so severe that visitors bringing food for relatives would be hurried through customs without delay and people were using envelopes of letters they'd received for writing letters. The reason for the crisis is that Polish debts to the West were coming due with the enormous sum of $7.6 billion scheduled for repayment this year. And due to the world economic slowdown, the demand for Polish goods has dropped badly in world markers.

The spark for the strike wave was the government's attempt to end rationing of meat and the distribution of meat through work places; instead, the government wanted to sell meat through the higher-priced commercial shops. Strikes in protest spead all over the country. Then, in August, a militant, 60-year-old woman worker was fired at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk. Thousands of workers struck and took over the shipyard, a center for Poland's large and internationally important ship-building industry. Just as they settled their strike, eight other workplaces informed them that they were on sympathy strikes and the Gdansk workers declared their first strike over--and immediately began a second strike together with the other 8 factories. Within 2 days there were 40 more factories and several days later, there were 200. Their demands (besides pay hikes, earlier retirement, etc) now included demands for new independent trade unions, freedom for political prisoners, limitations on censorship and an access to the media for the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church got its first chance to go on TV in post-war Polish history and repaid the Gdansk workers by urging they be moderate and go back to work. Catholic spokesmen also demanded that the Church be given more representation in parliament and other Catholic Church leaders began pressing their right of moral censorship over the media.

In spite of this "help" from the Church, the government was forced to give in on nearly every issue, including releasing the country's three known political prisoners. Gierek, head of the government, had a convenient heart attack and was replaced as Communist Party Chief by the former security chief. Interestingly enough, Kania, the new chief, had been in charge of relations with the Catholic Church and was very friendly with them. Rumor in Warsaw was that Kania defeated his nearest rival, Olszowsky as a result of a Church veto. Another interesting rumor says that the head of Gdansk was an Olszowsky protegé and that he provoked the Gdansk strike to bring down Gierek.

The main fear in Poland was that the Russians would intervene and in one thing most of the Communist Party, the army and the people seemed united: if Russians invade the Poles will fight (which is probably why the Russians have held off their invasion). To the credit of the Polish government, there was no violence; the police were disarmed to prevent any incidents and behaved much better than, for instance, in similar situations in South Korea.

Tass from Sovfoto

Soviet troops in a tactical exercise: The Poles were likely to put up a fight

The American government's response has been mostly hypocritical or ignorant. The Polish desk at the U.S. State Department even said that pleas for economic aid to Poland from Polish-American organizations were "preposterous" and that "Poland is an enemy of the West." Then he went on vacation in the middle of the crisis.

But since when do the bankers in New York and London give $20 billion to an enemy? The Carter administration later floated an explanation to a friendly columnist, claiming that by pretending not to care the U.S. would make Soviet intervention less likely! Well, no one ever said the U.S. State Department was very smart. Meanwhile, NATO has emphasized time and again that they would do nothing in the event of a Soviet invasion.

As for the U.S. press they did give some support to the strikers (even though sympathy strikes, strikes by government workers and seizure of workplaces are all totally illegal in the U.S.--and even with legal strikes the National Guard has been called in on many occasions). Still, Western support has been often lukewarm; seldom were lists of the workers' demands reprinted, and the press kept repeating that, if the workers got out of hand, the Soviets might intervene (so often did they repeat this that one suspects the wish was father to the thought). After all, cronic worker unrest can impede loan repayments, and it was the attempts by the governments to squeeze funds to pay the bankers that caused the whole mess in the first place.

The future will be interesting. The Soviets have been forced to fork over a large loan, including hard currency (which, because they are always hurting for it, must put them in a good mood). Now will come negotiations for rescheduling and easing the Polish debt repayments. If the Poles win easier terms this could be quite a victory for all small countries being bankrupted by the bankers--and many U.S. cities too (if Poland can win better repayment terms, why not Chicago or New York)? Poland is not the only country in the situation of having to pay back Western bankers during the economic slowdown and the whole world will be watching to see how it turns out.

And will the USSR invade to impose their version of "order"? While they are clearly reluctant to do so, they have made it clear that they will not tolerate certain changes in Polish society. They've launched many press attacks on the Polish workers' movement. While this is a gross violation of Poland's national sovereignty, it is also the so-called "Brezhnev doctrine" that the USSR has the right to intervene in any socialist country to protect "socialism."

It remains to be seen whether the Poles will overstep the line the Soviets have drawn, or whether the Soviets will take advantage of some weakness to intervene. So far the threat of invasion has accomplished some of what an invasion would accomplish. The latest meeting of the Warsaw Pact gave Kania and the Polish government some time to get things under control but it is well understood that, if they don't, the Soviets will come in--and Western bankers will dance in the streets.

Evan Douthit, VVAW,
Sandusky, Ohio

BLACKS IN MILITARY HISTORY

THE BUFFALO SOLDIERS

The U.S. Army found itself in bad shape following the Civil War. Authorized a strength of 54,641 officers and men, the actual strength was under 40,000 and most of them were in the defeated Confederacy as an Army of occupation. The barons of industry had another vital task for the Army to perform--the opening of the West with the millions upon millions of dollars to be made from land and from the railroads which would connect eastern manufacturing with western resources.

But, there was a critical barrier to the push westward; not just the natural difficulties of mountains, weather and distance which could be overcome, but the inhabitants of the area--the Indians--who fiercely resisted the invasion from the East. By the mid 1860's, the Indians had succeeded in pushing many of the ranchers, settlers and even the military back toward where they came from. So the call went out to recruit troops to fight the Indians.

The response was slight; most able-bodied men who could not afford to buy their way out of the military during the Civil War had had enough of fighting, and particularly fighting Indians, a job which was not only exhausting but dangerous. So the military, as it has in many instances before and after, turned to American minorities to find its forces. General Order #6, signed by Lt Gen William Tecumseh Sherman went out on August 9th, 1866: "Commanders of military departments within this division in which colored troops are serving will proceed at once to enlist men for two regiments of colored regulars ... one of cavalry, to be entitled the Tenth Regiment, United States Cavalry...."

Such was the beginning of the "Buffalo Regiment" which would exist through the North African campaign of World War II. This was far from the first time the military had turned to Black soldiers; some 180,000 Blacks had been recruited into the Union Army during the Civil War and over 33,000 had died during that conflict, often fighting in the dirtiest and least-known battles of that war. The established policy of all-Black units with almost all white officers lasted through World War II and into the early days of the Korean War.

The 10th Cav certainly did not have an easy birth. It was hard to find officers who would command Black units: George Custer was one who turned down a commission to serve with a Black regiment and at least one General took a lower rank to be part of a white regiment. Finally, Colonel Benjamin Grierson, an ex-music teacher from a small town in Illinois who disliked horses, took the job of commanding the 10th Cav with the provision that he reserved the right to accept only "superior men."

Black Cav soldiers at San Juan Hill in 1898.

It wasn't a problem to find volunteers: given the situation that ex-slaves faced in the South, the offer of $13 a month (considerably less than white soldiers were offered) as well as room, board, clothing and a horse was relatively attractive (the economic draft where minorities and other poor "volunteer" because there isn't much else to do is not something new). Finally, there was the problem of equipment. Horses, saddles and other trappings, weapons, and even food were things which had been refused by other frontier units. Many horses died on their way to the 10th; saddles and bridles fell apart, and food was full of maggots. Finally, in August of 1867 the 10th Cav hobbled into Western Kansas to meet the Cheyenne Indians.

The 10th was not going up against an unknown enemy--the Cheyenne, known as the "Dog Soldiers," had earned a formidable reputation, so great that one American unit had refused to fire on them (in fear of retaliation) and two other units had mutinied rather than face them. While neither then nor in the most recent U.S. military venture was the U.S. Army very effective against guerilla tactics such as those used by the Indians, the Plains Indians, and particularly the "Dog Soldiers" had more going for them.

Tribal lore, custom and tradition made it clear that the individual warrior was invincible. "Power" or "medicine" was part of being a warrior and the power was supernatural in origin. In some cases it worked--a Cheyenne warrior named Roman Nose by closely following taboos laid down by the local medicine man charged alone four times in front of 2000 U.S. soldiers who succeeded only in killing his horse. And such exploits were well publicized, not only in song and story but even in the markings worn by individual warriors (the U.S. military does the same thing today with ribbons and medals).

Each feather in the headdress represented a death or a blow against the enemy; horses were painted in the same way--a hoofprint on the flank meant an enemy horse captured, a red handprint meant an enemy killed in hand-to-hand combat as did a handprint on a warrior's shirt or one painted over a warrior's mouth. And so did a face painted black.

When Pvt John Randall of the 10th Cav rode out as escort for several hunters trying to find buffalo meat to feed the line gang working on the railroad, the chances are that he knew none of this history. He did know that the horse he rode and the weapons he carried were far inferior to those of the hunters he was supposed to be protecting. When the Cheyenne attacked, the hunters got the hell out of the area back to the military base with the railroad crew. But Randall, musket in hand and mounted on a lame horse, could not move as fast. His horse was shot from under him, his musket was lost, and he was barely able to find shelter under a section of track. He fired his pistol at the charging Indians who drew back to attack one by one. Eleven of them scored hits with spears and, after a counter-attack by Randall's unit, 13 were left dead. Randall was a bloody mess, but survived--and the Indians knew they had not killed him. When they returned to their village, the songs and stories about the episode told of the Black man who had fought like a cornered buffalo, who had suffered wound after wound but had not died--also like the buffalo.

The story spread as far south and west as the Apache, Arapaho and Commanche--the story of the Black "white" man who fought like a cornered buffalo, and the 10th Cav not only became known as the "Buffalo Soldiers" but as the Black-faced soldiers who could not be beaten. And with shabby, cast-off equipment, inferior horses and weapons, the 10th Cav fought in the Indian wars from 1867 until 1890 and were in fact never beaten. Unlike the early days, officers now looked for assignments to the 10th, and General Pershing spoke so highly of his service with the Black regiment that he became known as "Black Jack" Pershing. The Buffalo Soldiers went on to rescue Teddy Roosevelt's "Rough Riders" at San Juan Hill causing Roosevelt to

turn to page 12

WHAT WENT WRONG IN VIETNAM

From the beginnings of VVAW in 1967 straight through the final victory of the people of Vietnam in 1975, VVAW stood firmly with the goals of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in South Vietnam and the government of North Vietnam. We not only believed the statement by Ho Chi Minh that, "Nothing is more precious than freedom and independence," but fully supported the efforts of the Vietnamese people to turn the statement into reality. Like millions of other people around the world, we rejoiced with the final victory of the Vietnamese people when the U.S. was finally tossed out and the corrupt and dictatorial government of South Vietnam was forced to flee the country.

In part because we so firmly supported the cause of liberation in Vietnam we hesitated to comment on Vietnam's increasing dependence on the Soviet Union, though we viewed this development with increasing alarm. We could not see how a government and a people which had fought so well against U.S. imperialism could fall into the arms of the other great imperialist power and exchange the bold struggle against U.S. aggression against the people of Vietnam for a love-in with the Russians whose purposes were much the same. With Vietnam's invasion of neighboring Cambodia and with the border war with China, the designs of the Vietnamese government became clearer--they wished to dominate all of Southeast Asia and turn it into a greater Indochina over which the Vietnamese would have control.

Victorious liberation fighters greeting villagers in South Vietnam

Some of the problems facing the people of Vietnam today were made clear in an interview with Truong Nhu Tang, a founding member of the NLF in 1960 and Minister of Justice in the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) from 1969 to 1976. Under the Russian dominated version of Vietnam which sprang up after the success of the liberation struggle, Truong Nhu Tang escaped Vietnam to France where he now works in a tire factory.

"As one who has given my entire adult life to the cause of the Vietnamese nation," he said, "I must tell you that the liberation in Vietnam has been betrayed." The present government of Vietnam, he said, is carrying out a repression more severe than that of the old Thieu regime in South Vietnam. The government, he said, "has sold out Vietnamese national interests to the Soviet Union and is continuing to make war in Kampuchea (Cambodia) and Laos in order to create a Soviet-Vietnamese sphere of influence where once there was an American one."

Under the Soviet puppet regime, Truong states, there are severe food shortages, political repression, persecution of the ethnic Chinese and heavy battlefield casualties among the Vietnamese troops inside Kampuchea. In addition to these substantial problems, there is the failure of the Soviet Union to live up to the promises it has made concerning economic aid. One result of this, according to Truong, is the beginning of a resistance movement inside Vietnam, based on throwing over the present power structure controlled by Le Duan, secretary general of the Vietnamese Communist Party, and the most powerful figure in present-day Vietnam.

As in the past, the key posts in the government are held by relatives of the rulers; Le Duan has sons in key military positions of power, a brother-in-law as chief of the propaganda commission's secret service and other in-laws and nephews scattered throughout the government and the military. Le Duc Tho (chief of the organizational department of the Vietnamese Communist Party) has brothers in key party positions--all of this being reminiscent of the days when South Vietnamese President Diem ran his country like it was a family-owned business. It is a long ways from the freedom and independence for which the people of Vietnam sacrificed so much for so many years.

For hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese for whom the victory in the liberation struggle might have meant an era of peace and rebuilding it has instead meant more fighting--invading Kampuchea and involved in a border war with China. Meanwhile they have seen their country fall more and more under the wing of the Soviet Union whose policies in other areas of the world and with other satellites (as in the case of Cuba) has meant economic disaster.

Truong now speaks of "liberation betrayed." For the people of South Vietnam who bore the brunt of the years of war, and for members of what was the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) which gave political leadership to the fight against the American invasion of the country, the loss has been extreme. Although Ho Chi Minh had talked of gradual reunification of Vietnam the Hanoi government didn't wait. Few members of the PRG ended up with any position in the "unified" government, and even those seem to have little real power. And always in the background lurked the Soviet Union ready to gobble up whatever it could and use Vietnam to its own ends.

There is little doubt that the war of liberation in Vietnam went sour. For those of us who supported the struggle in Vietnam in every way we could, we can only look with regret at what has happened, but that in no way changes the fact that our support was right. We stood shoulder to shoulder with the Vietnamese people in their struggle for liberation--a struggle which was not only right but victorious--and celebrated with them. That the fruits of their struggle have turned sour only means that we will stand again with the people of that country when their struggle begins anew.

continued
Buffalo Soldiers

comment, "I wish no better men besides me in battle than these colored troops showed themselves to be."

The buffalo was eventually adopted as part of the insignia of the 10th Cav which spent World War I along the Mexican border and World War II in North Africa. Of course Black history has never been, until recently, anything more than a very poor relative of "American" history, but next time you're watching a grade "B" movie, as the cavalry comes charging to the rescue, consider that the cavalry that's charging might well have been the "Buffalo Soldiers" of the 10th Cav.

10 Years Ago: Testimony and Medals
Winter Soldier Investigation & Dewey Canyon

The early days of 1981 provide VVAW with a time to look back--it was ten years ago that two of the major events in the history of the organization took place. The Winter Soldier Investigation where Vietnam vets talked about their particpation in the atrocities of Vietnam was held in Detroit at the end of January and beginning of February of 1971, and growing out of the sparks of this event came the demonstration which we called Dewey Canyon III where Vietnam vets threw their medals on the steps of the U.S. Capitol, straight into the teeth of the government which had sent us off to fight their war.

Both events had an impact way beyond the limited number of vets who took part. Never before in U.S. history had a group of veterans of a war taken a stand against that war while it was still going on, and as some of us were testifying or flinging away the government's rewards for being "good little soldiers," other of our brothers were slogging through the rice paddies in Southeast Asia. Even though the government attempted to portray us as non-vet hippies (until we waved discharge forms at them), or dope-crazed psychos, or pinko freaks, it was clear to the millions who saw us on TV or who talked to us on the streets of every major city

in the country that we were the children of the silent majority which was already, in 1971, beginning to turn staunchly against the Vietnam War.

The Winter Soldier Investigations saw vet after vet describe his own, personal participation in war crimes--atrocities which became normal in Vietnam where government policy demanded a body count but didn't care whose bodies were counted--and made it clear that massacres such as My Lai were not just the isolated instances of men gone mad that the government tried to portray them as.

Dewey Canyon III, named after operations in Vietnam which secretly moved into Cambodia (invasions that were adamantly denied by the U.S. government) saw a week's worth of actions around Washington including a fruitless attempt to explain to members of Congress what was happening in Vietnam. But the impact of the final day's throwing away of medals seared its way into the consciousness of the American public.

Whether or not people agreed with what we were saying, VVAW had the advantage that no one could challenge either our right to speak or the credibility of our statements: we had been there, we had fought the war while the rich who profitted from it sat comfortably at home, and we knew what we were talking about.

As the Vietnam War recedes into history VVAW still has the experience from which to speak out. And we will--against the draft which sent many of us to fight, and for vets. VVAW's history is part of us, and we plan to live up to it.

Many of those who were part of VVAW during 1971 have dropped away though they are involved in other fights. Ten years after, we look forward to some of them rejoining and getting involved in the struggle to win testing, treatment and compensation for victims of Agent Orange, and no draft. It won't be easy, but we will win.

Letter to VVAW on Vietnam from
Vietnamese Revolutionary

Hoang Van Hoan, comrade in arms of Ho Chi Minh and founding member of the Vietnamese Communist Party has been sentenced to death by the Vietnamese government

Vietnam Veterans Against
the War:

I am indeed very glad to know that your organization, Vietnam Veterans Against the War, has consistently been concerned with the situation in Vietnam. In their struggle for national liberation, the Vietnamese people enjoyed the sympathy and support shown by many soldiers in the U.S. armed forces, and, in particular, by the members of VVAW. Your just and courageous actions made an invaluable contribution to Vietnam's brilliant victory in 1975. The Vietnamese people very much appreciated and were grateful to your deeds.

With the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Vietnam and the total collapse of the Nguyen Van Thieu regime, the Vietnamese people did have a fine opportunity to follow the wise advice of our great leader Chairman Ho Chi Minh to build Vietnam into a peaceful, united, independent, democratic and prosperous country. But this wise advice has been flagrantly betrayed by Le Duan and company as they have attempted to push an expansionist drive in Southeast Asia. Facing angry eyes of the progressive and righteous-minded people of the world, they defiantly sent troops to dominate Laos, to invade and occupy Kampuchea, and to provoke border conflicts in the north so as to carry out a policy of hostility against China, which is the close comrade-in-arms of the Vietnamese people. Therefore, the Vietnamese people once again cannot but lead a life of utter poverty and misery under war conditions with all their democratic rights and freedom deprived, while Vietnam as a nation has become economically, politically, militarily and in foreign affairs a vassal state of a foreign power and lost all its international prestige. All this is brought about by the crimes committed by Le Duan and company and not the result of the withdrawal of U.S. troops, as a few Americans tended to believe.

If to say that in the past, the Vietnamese people had to sacrifice all that they had to fight against U.S. imperialism and its lackeys, today they are compelled to rise up again to fight the dictatorial and corrupted rule of Le Duan and company.

I am confident that the Vietnamese people will receive sympathy and support from you and other progressive people of the U.S. in their struggle to make their motherland a peaceful, united, independent, democratic and prosperous country.

With friendly greetings,

Hoang Van Hoan

Organize, Unite
JOIN VVAW!

SPECIAL!

WHAT IS AGENT ORANGE....page 16

SUPPLEMENT THE VETERAN
Vietnam Veterans Against the War

Veterans' Investigation into Effects & Problems

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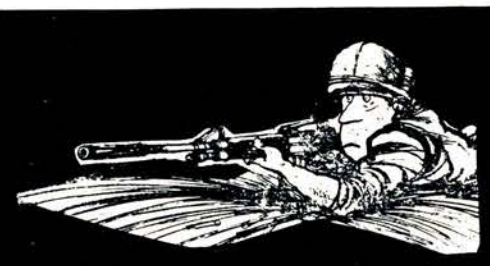
FRAGGIN'



Sp 5 Willy(Ret.)

DEATH BY THE
GREAT SALT LAKE

Civilian maintenance workers are dying off at Hill Airforce Base in Utah. Using various paints, solvents and cleaners, exposed workers have been getting sick and dying off before their time.

The workers and their union leaders are trying to get the situation corrected and obtain workman's compensation for those already affected. However, in dealing with the USAF they've run up against a stone wall.

According to local union leaders, the best witnesses to the chemical hazards are dying off. Neil Breeden, President of Local 1592 of the American Federation of Government Employees, estimates that 150 people have died from exposure to dangerous substances.

Breeden is now collecting notarized statements from current and former employees working at the base. Three years ago he had 20 witnesses lined up to testify. Now, 14 of them are dead.

Liver trouble, heart trouble, diabetes, eye problems, addiction to some of the chemicals and disorientation, nausea, respiratory problems, dizziness and change in personality are some of the problems. Death has come as a result of some of these problems or from cancer.

It is estimated that these exposure problems date back 25 years. Records show that officials at the Base knew there were problems back in 1968. Records show that employees were being treated for physical symptoms that were not normal.

The Air Force has yet to admit to their role in the chemical exposure. As a result, those affected have to pay for their own medical treatment and others face all the same dangers in the future.

* * * * * * * *

Remember the old days--and maybe even today? In your wildest dreams did you ever think about sneaking into the motor pool? You climb into a SPV (self-propelled vehicle) with a big 155 mm barrel. You crank up the engine and start it rolling across the base.

Maybe by this time, someone discovers what you're doing and the whole base gets excited. You roll on. You see your CO, flip him the bird and maybe swing the turret in his direction to what kind of look he gets in his eyes.

You approach the perimeter and knock over a fence. There's a security post over to the right. Some MP's are standing there with rifles at the ready. You swing over in that direction and aim the big howitzer at the MP's. They scatter and you knock over their little security post, and you're out on the highway.

Next thing you know, there's an Oklahoma Smokey circling around you. The guy tries to be John Wayne and put his car in front of you. You keep rolling and when you get about a foot away, he speeds off like a scared rabbit.

Then you get into town and every squad car they have is after you. They're moving in and out, screeching their tires and chasing you around like a Blues Brothers movie. You see a cop that looks like the one that hassled you for being drunk, and you aim the 26 tons of weapon at him--he runs.

This goes on for two hours before they stop you. Tear gas is what gets you. You have to give up.

This wasn't a dream. This was not a dream! A Vietnam vet did it at Ft Sill, Oklahoma. The FBI won't give out his name but let's hope the brother gets off easy--after all, he didn't hurt anyone. He was only living a dream.

****

Maybe some of the money saved will go to lawn care. According to Senator Proxmire, the Defense Department last year spent $500,000 keeping the grass green on the lawns of generals and admirals on 22 military bases.

And they could just have used the leftover Agent Orange and not have had to worry about grass for the next 15 years!

* * * * * * * *

Preparations for war? The Pentagon is re-coating the front of the building. Now when demonstrators write protests against the next war on the front of the Pentagon building, they will be able to wash them off the new coating for only $100. In the old days it cost $5000 to sand blast off the graffitti. This is the first known effort in recent history of these folks trying to cut the military budget.

* * * * * *

Then there was the Navy recruiter in Detroit who attached a pamphlet call "The Sailor" to the Navy's literature. It said, "Girls love him, towns tolerate him and the government supports him....Some of his likes are women, girls, females, dames, broads and the opposite sex.... All his faults become insignificant....when he looks at you with those bloodshot eyes and says, 'Hi, Honey. Take off your clothes!'"

Few sailors are quite such chauvinist pigs--we signed up to romp on the beach with those wholesome girls in the Navy's TV ads. And we wonder if the recruiter attached the pamphlets given to the women the Navy keeps trying to recruit?

* * * * * * * * * * * * * *

Maybe the Navy is a little kinky after all. Recently at the Naval Academy at Annapolis, one woman coed took on five of the men. Then another of these future "leaders" of the US Navy started his camera rolling. If these are the leaders of the Navy I suppose that the Detroit recruiter was only following orders!

GRENADE OF THE MONTH

This month's granade goes to General Volsey Warner of the U.S. Readiness Command and overseer of the Rapid Deployment Force. Gen Warner says that we'll have to throw away the 82nd Airborne Division and a Marine Brigade to defend oil in the Persian Gulf.

Warner said that even though it may be in vain, it would not be "too big a force to lose" to make a stand. What the hell? It's only 35,000 men. To defend OIL! The General doesn't even cover it over to say it's for "freedom" and "democracy."

continued
VETS' NOTES

along 85,000 cases to the Justice Department. By agreement with the IRS to help find addresses, the VA had referred 228,000 accounts to the IRS to help find the addresses. A computer told the VA that 3.3 thousand employees were among those with delinquent bills and the amounts were deducted from salaries or retirement accounts. A computer matching service is also at work with other government agencies, so if you work for the postoffice, the military, or any other government agency, the tap on the shoulder may come soon with some kind of agent from some government agency demanding that you pay your debts. Statistics are not available about price of this program, the salaries of the investigators and agents, and all the rest that goes into this massive collection attempt--and no one will tell whether or not the price of the program is greater or less than the cost of the outstanding debt.

Of course we believe that veterans should pay their debts, particularly since the money comes out of our tax dollars. At the same time we know too many vets who were tossed off the GI Bill by not meeting some requirement or other because their landlord would no longer take the VA's promise that the check would soon arrive. Student loans required two lending institutions to turn the vet down before they could get the VA loan--and that hardly makes for the best credit risks. And any vet who has dealt at all with the VA has met the functionaries whose only (well-paid) job is to mess with vets who need help, not hassle.

NEW PHONE

VVAW

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or call
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989-4684 or
463-2127

LETTERS TO VVAW

NEW ADDRESS

THE VETERAN welcomes letters, comments and criticisms. Please write. Also, send along any poetry, drawings, photos or stories you would like to see in the paper.

P O Box 25592
Chicago, IL 60625
(312) 989-4684

Dear VVAW,

Would appreciate a copy of the four page form concerning Agent Orange (the Agent Orange Self-Help Guide).

The herbicide 2,4,5-T and 2,4-D is being used here in Manitoba. In 1974 Irene Stein began the fight against the use of malathion being used for foggin mosquitos and spraying forest tent caterpillars. Phenoxy herbicides were used by Manitoba Hydro and the Department of Highways on the perimeter highway which circles outside of Winnipeg city. 2,4-D is used extensively on golf courses, city boulevards, agriculture, rail right-of-ways and pasture land. 2,4,5-T mixed with 2,4-D is used on crown lands to defoliate brush and aspen. This procedure is then followed by cattle grazing to finish trampling the brush. Hopefully, Manitoba beef has not been sold in the U.S.

I found 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T mix containers in the garbage dump within the Whitesbell Provincial Park. My daughter in '75 was at our cottage while spraying with Agent Orange was going on 3 miles north of our cabin. We were totally unaware. She became ill, vomited blood and was in bed, all alone for three days. She said she was very weak. Our well water is contaminated but our provincial lab refuses to test for 2,4,5-T and dioxin.

We had sent our daughter away to the cabin to escape the city's massive spray program, but enroute, the highways had also been done.

Today Manitoba has the 2nd highest cancer rate and highest infant mortality rate. There is data showing Manitoba's environment is contaminated with Phenols....

N. Z.
Manitoba
Canada

Dear VVAW,

Enclosed is a small contribution to help your work. I wish it could be larger but I am 82 and money doesn't stretch far anymore. I remember greeting you when you marched near here (Operation RAW--rapid American withdrawal--in 1970) and am so pleased to hear you're keeping up the work.

L. M.
Philadephia

Vietnam Sin

Far away, lost civilization
I was a kid, I did not know
Nobody had the realization
What a sad blow.
We had committed a sin
All they said was win.
I lost my soul, I cried my tears
Now I'm not the same
The scars in my face show
the years
I'm half insane and in shame.
America they say was right
Go there and fight.
What do I do now?
Cry, I don't know how
I lost that those years
I have no more tears.
Now they say: "Stay away"
You remind me, they say
Of Vietnam our sin.

Lettman
Chicago

Agent Orange PAMPHLET

25¢ Post Paid
Make checks payable to
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continued from page 3

REAGAN

into most voting blocks, obviously there is a definite need to place strong campaign emphasis on the needs and desires of all veterans, and to develop and aggressively promote a reasonable, well-balanced and forward-moving veterans policy which will be attractive to all veterans." The American Legion, the VFW and similar groups were, of course, overjoyed by Reagan's win, as much over his plans to nuke anything that moves as by his lucrative campaign promises to veterans.

Veterans for Republicans, a group directed by Bill Ayres, worked as Reagan's advisors on vets' issues during the campaign. Among the vital issues they pushed on Reagan's campaign were:

1. Maintenance of the V.A. as a distinct, independent agency.

2. Re-establish veterans as the first priority of the V.A. hospital system.

3. Vets pensions, disability benefits, vocational rehabilitation and educational assistance are indexed to the actual rise in inflation.

4. "Although the effects of Agent Orange on Vietnam vets has yet to be scientifically proven, efforts should be made to determine the possibility of side effects on veterans; pending final determination, it would be appropriate and responsible to grant temporary VA medical care to vets suspected of suffering from Orange toxicity. This is the least we owe to vets who may be suffering irreparable damage due to a government-sponsored program!"

5. There should be active support for upgrading Vietnam-era vets' benefits. "Any media attempts to play on the Vietnam veteran issue as a Vietnam war issue will not carry with the voters, and a strong, compassionate statement by Governor Reagan on the plight of Vietnam-era veterans, issued just before election day, will have a favorable effect on millions of Americans, especially in ethnic and minority groups."

6. Maintain support for vets' preference in all federal hiring.

Not bad as a laundry list of demands of vets, though some items--like job training--are not on the list. But while we hope each and every one of these suggestions goes into effect, there are a couple of problems. First, as made clear in the suggestion about upgrading Vietnam-era vets' benefits, this is chosen because it will play well with the electorate--that it may win some votes. But the votes are in and now what? Vets have lived through campaign promises before and have learned, through hard experience that talk is cheap but action comes much more slowly--if at all.

There is also a more deep-seated suspicion about this particular campaign promise. Reagan already has the traditional veterans groups in his pocket since they love his plans increase military spending and stamp out the communist menace around the world. Vietnam vets are less susceptible to this kind of thing--we were already sent off to defeat communism in what Reagan has called the "noble cause" in Vietnam--but we found we were only propping up an unpopular and corrupt dictatorship. If Reagan can win over Vietnam vets with campaign promises--and even by fulfilling some of them--perhaps he will have less opposition for the next military venture that he and his advisors are already plotting out.

And for Vietnam vets, all the benefits in the world are not worth sucking our children into another Vietnam. Campaign promises we will believe when we see them in action--and not before. And even then we will look closely! Pete Zastrow
VVAW National Office

RECOLLECTIONS

The episode is one of a series of recollections from Vietnam and the military. VVAW hopes to print a book of such recollections--the "war stories" which often go a long ways toward showing what rich man's war was all about. We invite veterans to contribute their recollections

"He Was Dead and I Was Going Home"

I had spent approximately ten months in the field, first in the Northern section of I Corps in Vietnam with the 196th Infantry Brigade. Now that Brigade was incorporated into the Americal Division with the 11th Infantry Brigade newly arrived from Hawaii. Things were very different in this unit: casualties were extremely heavy, not from shooting combat but from mines. In the almost two months I spent with them, we had suffered almost 40% casualties with only one man shot; the rest were bouncing betties, foot poppers and a few anti-tank mines.* It produced a strange psychology where shooting combat was almost a relief. Firing your weapon and being shot at seemed more personal and safer, somehow, than mines. The constant pressure of the mines combined with the push for a body count produced things like the My Lai massacre--the pressure created a kind of psychosis I had not seen in much more difficult combat situations.

On this morning I was coming down the hill toward our company position after an all-night ambush. Across a ridge line I could see another squad of my platoon weaving its way back also. Suddenly there was smoke combined with an explosion. My platoon Sgt was hit, blown off the ground by a bouncing Betty. There was plenty of screaming as a medic tried to patch him up. "My balls--do I have my balls!" In a short time the Sgt was on a Medevac chopper; we continued toward the perimeter. Casualties never gave speeches or were hit clean like in the movies; it was always noise and real blood--red, followed by silence.

Once we'd got inside the perimeter the Company Commander told me the Battalion chopper was coming in and to gather my things and report to it. I was beside myself with joy--only 45 days left and now I was being taken out of the field. I grabbed my stuff and headed for the smoke that signalled the incoming chopper. When I got to it, the Battalion Commander held up a paper for me to read: "YOUR NEPHEW ROBERT WAS KILLED ALONG THE DMZ; YOU HAVE BEEN REQUESTED AS BODY ESCORT; WILL YOU GO?"

Nothing was said as I

climbed on the chopper. I was only a month older than Bob; we had both been in the 196th together--and now he was dead and I was going home. I had been raised more as a brother than as an uncle--and he was dead and I was going home. In less than 12 hours I was at Cam Ranh Bay sitting inside a large transport waiting to fly home. In between I had flown to Chu Lai to Division HQ and found a Staff Sgt from my old unit. He told me that Bob had been shot in the neck along the DMZ and that no one could get to him because of intense fire. He had drowned in his own blood. He had tried to help a friend who had been shot and was hit himself, so he was getting a medal along with the coffin. The Sgt said I was getting one too for a previous action while I was with the unit. So my nephew and I would be going home together both with medals on our uniforms. Only no one could see Bob's--he had spent too much time in the jungle and his casket would not be opened.

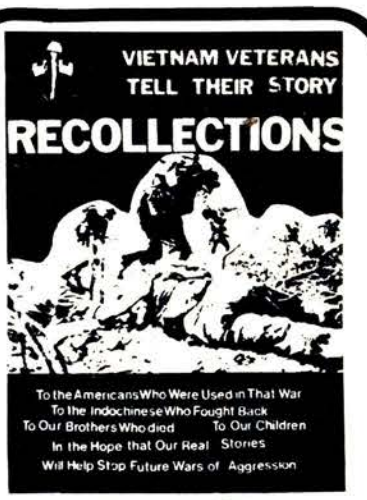
Bob really didn't have much luck. While others were getting deferments, he was drafted. While Congressmen's sons were getting 4-F's for braces on their teeth, Bob was drafted as part of "Project 100,000." He didn't want to go but Secretary of Defense McNamara had come up with a plan to draft 100,000 men a year physically or mentally unable to pass the tests--and that left the sons of the rich free to take over daddy's business.

It took me only 24 hours to get back to the USA--the world.

Everything happened so quickly that I had not even been able to wash. The only cloths I had were some rumpled khackis I had worn on R&R six months before. Bob was left on base and I took a taxi to find a hotel, only there were no vacancies: sign after sign said "Welcome," but when I asked at the lobbies the clerk always said, "No Vacancy."

I spent more time in the taxi than I had spent clearing Vietnam. Finally I found a place with color TV, double bed, bath with shower. I had gone from an ambush patrol to a color TV in less than 24 hours, arriving with Vietnamese mud and my nephew's body. I made it out alive but the "world" had somehow changed and now Vietnam seemed much more real.

Barry Romo
VVAW National Office



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THE VETERAN'S BACK PAGE